

BUSINESS MARKETING & MANAGEMENT

CREATING A UNIQUE SERVICE CULTURE

It takes time, effort and resources...but the competitive benefits are enormous



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DEFINE YOUR BRANDED SERVICE BLUEPRINT
Let's start with some strategic thought questions. "What is your brand promise? What will be unique about your brand experience? What are the brand service values that will guide the behaviors and systems in your organization? These critical strategic issues are decided on by the leadership of the organization. They provide the foundation for the development of the culture and supporting systems to make branded service a part of your company's organizational DNA.

MEASURE TO STAY ON TRACK AND IMPROVE
Measures are an important part of your brand of service culture development and maintenance. It's important to measure how far along you are from your ideal position. There are many measurement tools and models available, including the Brand Discovery, Business Competitive Survey, Organization Climate Survey and Customer Research.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TO REMIND AND ENERGIZE
Effective internal communications is a powerful tool to keep the message and excitement alive, and to keep people motivated to deliver your unique brand experience.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT - YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE YOUR SERVICE BRAND
Brand engagement is the process of knowing the hearts and minds of the people who create the brand experience - your employees.

SERVICE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO SUSTAIN
You will measure your investment in your branded service culture by having management systems, structures and processes that are consistent with the brand. This includes your recruitment, and reward and recognition programs.

Measures are an important part of your branded service culture development and maintenance.

Creating a Unique Service Culture

It takes time, effort and resources... but the competitive benefits are enormous

**By George Aveling
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Previously, I wrote about the concept of Branded Customer Service and how it was a new competitive edge. By creating a branded customer service culture, you will create a true point of differentiation between your company and competitors.

In this article, I will give you some pointers on how to create a branded customer service culture. But first, let's keep you reading by reassuring you that the concept of branded service applies to all businesses. You can create competitive advantage and differentiate your service with your own brand of service. So, in this article, I am going to give you five key areas to take you to the next phase of service – how to create the branded customer service culture!

DEFINE YOUR BRANDED SERVICE BLUEPRINT

Let's start with some strategic blueprint questions. What is your brand promise? What will be unique about your brand experience? What are the brand service values that will guide the behaviours and systems in your organisation? These critical strategic issues are decided on by the leadership of the organisation.

They provide the foundation for the development of the culture and supporting systems to

make branded service a part of your company's organisational DNA.

I was recently in the USA and spent a short period of time helping a theatre company define its unique branded service experience. Up until our involvement, the thinking in this theatre was that the customer experience commenced when the lights dimmed and the play commenced. The rest of the service experience was inconsistent. We developed a set of brand values for the theatre company, two of which were Entertaining and Exciting. Now imagine the experience in a culture shaped by the value of Entertaining and Exciting. The box office staff would aim to excite guests about the shows. Even the ushers would think differently about their jobs.

MEASURE TO STAY ON TRACK...AND IMPROVE

Measures are an important part of your branded service culture development and maintenance. It's important to measure how far away you are from your ideal position. There are many measurement

tools and audits available, including On-Brand Discovery, Business Connection Surveys, Organisational Climate Surveys and Customer Research.

These tools will help you pinpoint where you need to place most focus in embedding your branded service culture. And then, over time, you can track your performance as an "on-brand" service provider and keep getting better and better.

Thank about your company. What measures do you use now? Do they guide your decision making? If you aren't measuring, on what basis are you making your customer focused decisions?

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TO REMIND AND ENERGISE

Effective internal communications is a powerful tool to keep the message and excitement alive, and to keep people motivated to deliver you unique brand experience. Successful implementation of this phase involves the development of a creative internal communications plan as well as the use of language that has a tone, spirit and logic that is consistent with your brand values.

There are many ways to be innovative in your communications planning.

You can have creative and colourful brand books that provide a blueprint for all employees to guide them in their branded service efforts.

Other ideas include brand rallies which bring together significant parts of the organisation to create energy and excitement

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about the brand experience, branded email, media boards which profile relevant press coverage and snapshots and "Values Theme Days", which may include speakers, competitions and dress themes to match a particular service value.

SERVICE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO SYSTEMISE

You will maximise your investment in your branded service culture by having management systems, structures and processes that are consistent with the brand. This includes your recruitment, and reward and recognition processes.

When I was in the US, I came across an excellent example of a company that recruits around its brand. Ethel M chocolates in the US seeks new recruits by stating that it seeks people

with a passion for chocolate.

This is what the recruitment card in one of their shops said...

Our recipe for success: "Chocolate passionates sharing their love of great confections with eager consumers every day. Sales Associates.

We are seeking individuals with a passion for customer service and a love of chocolate. We are hiring Sales Associates for our Henderson and Las Vegas stores. If you have an infectious energy, a true understanding of extraordinary customer service, and are flexible with scheduling, this is the place for you".

This wording gives potential applicants a quick idea on the type of people that Ethel M is seeking to hire. It immediately builds a sense of excitement about working for Ethel M, and it probably weeds out people who don't think that they can deliver on the experience as well!

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT – YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE YOUR SERVICE BRAND

Brand engagement is the process of winning

the hearts and minds of the people who create the brand experience – your employees. This is most often conducted by means of large scale training programmes that educate, motivate and inspire employees to deliver on the brand experience.

When offered in a short period of time, Brand Engagement experiences can "tip" the organisation quickly, infusing a great deal of energy. These events are ideally opened by the CEO of the organisation as a symbol of the importance of the event.

One final word. Developing your service culture should be a standing item on your management agenda. It's not your project for this year, or next. It's one of the most important ongoing journeys that your company will continually travel down.

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